

Puss Brooke, Gerald
On

THE PRISONER OF MORDAVIA

A SPECIAL Correspondent has been investigating the case of Mr. Gerald Brooke exclusively for this Service. He reports as follows:

On April 29 last year, agents of the Soviet KGB went to the flat of one Yurii Konstantinov in Kropotkin Street, Moscow, and arrested twenty-six-year-old Gerald Brooke, a teacher of Russian at Holborn College, London.

Western journalists in the capital got wind of this two days later, but Brooke was held *incommunicado* for nearly a fortnight. Not until July 10, when he was charged with anti-Soviet activities and subversion, was the Russian public informed.

At first, it looked as if a full-scale show trial was planned. The theatre of the Central Artists' House was prepared. In the event, what has been described as the first completely political trial in Russia since that of Bukharin and his associates in 1938 differed markedly in that, when it took place on July 22 and 23, the western Press was excluded. Part of the trial was held in camera.

Brooke's wife had suffered a night-long secret police interrogation, but was not charged. Brooke told the Court: "I recognise myself as completely and totally guilty." He was "defended" by the notorious Nikolai Borovik, a KGB employee who is paid by the state and by his client.

Confused Reports

Soviet newspapers (notably *Trud* and *Krasnaya Zvezda*), fed colourful and sometimes contradictory information by the KGB, had a field day. It is no wonder that somewhat confused reports appeared in the western Press. But the verdict, and even the sentence, were correctly predicted.

Found guilty, Brooke was sent to gaol for a year, with four further years in a labour camp. He has just been taken, weakened by a deplorable prison diet at Vladimir, to Mordovia labour colony on the Volga.

He was last seen by a British Consul on March 6, when he was given a food parcel. Others have been returned. He is allowed two a year at the camp. He could easily die there, although he is only twenty-seven.

Brooke's Assignment

In the days before the trial, virulent as their comments were, the Russian newspapers seemed unable to decide whether Brooke was employed by British Intelligence or by a Russian émigré organisation.

Reports published in the West tended to suggest that he was the innocent head of a delegation of teachers who had somehow fallen foul of the Soviet authorities and had been selected by them as a scapegoat in the cold war.

This is the sort of situation in which one can usually spot an Intelligence agent who is immediately disowned by his own Government. Mr. Greville Wynne (sentenced for espionage in 1963 and later exchanged for the Russian spy Lonsdale) was a good example of this.

Just as Wynne (whose nerves were shattered by his ordeal) went behind the Iron Curtain on legitimate business, with a part-time Intelligence assignment, so Brooke went to Moscow as a *bona fide* delegate with certain other commissions—but from a different source.

NTS

As it emerged at his trial, specific to the indictment were charges that he acted as a courier and agent for the Popular Labour Alliance, or NTS (*Narodno Trudovoi Soyuz*).

Students of the cold war will know that NTS has nothing to do with British Intelligence. Successive Governments have regarded it with an edginess akin to that of the U.S. State Department *vis-à-vis* the anti-Castro Cuban exiles.

Nor has NTS's philosophy much in common with that of rebel intellectuals like Tarsis and Yevtushenko. Politically speaking, it is more of an age with the deep-seated, meditative, almost religious thinking of the late Boris Pasternak. And it has a long memory.

NTS was formed in the early '30s by a group of Russian students from western European universities. Infiltration began by the formation of small cells in the Soviet Union in 1932. Other activities included (in 1935) sending leaflets across the border by balloon.

Many Infiltrators

The members were intelligent and dedicated expatriates making "a serious and profound intellectual effort" to produce a set of ideas with greater relevance and with a stronger power of attraction for the people of Russia than the dogmas of Communism. They attracted support from many people, including some who had bitter reasons for hatred of Bolshevik Russia.

In 1938, the year of some of Stalin's worst purge trials, in which thousands perished, the OGPU claimed the capture of several NTS "saboteurs".

In World War II, the Soviets found it convenient to charge NTS with pro-Nazism. But NTS claimed that it was completely anti-Nazi before, as well as after, the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. ("Neither Stalin nor Hitler.") The war's confused mass-movements of population enabled many NTS infiltrators to take up strategic positions.

Solidarism

NTS believes in what it calls Solidarism—Man's cooperation, brotherhood, Christian tolerance, and charity.

It describes its politics and policies as similar to those of the right wing of the

Labour and Social Democratic Parties of western Europe.

The chief NTS headquarters is in Paris, whence it claims to have sent a hundred million newspapers and other items of literature into Russia by various means. It also sends cheap plastic and rubber printing "mats" for easy use by underground presses *in situ*. When Brooke was arrested, some of these were found.

NTS has its own broadcasting station, Radio Free Russia, which is subject to severe jamming but is heard as far away as Vladivostok.

Arrest and Torture

It has another headquarters at Frankfurt. There, in 1954, the MVD agent N. E. Khokhlov was sent to murder one of its leaders, G. S. Okolovich, with a gun disguised as a cigarette pack. Khokhlov changed his mind, defected to the West, and made world headlines.

Soviet police have captured and tortured many an NTS man, while the Russian authorities have, frequently accused, the organisation of violent methods. And, in 1953, a secret MVD report called "Orientation on the Anti-Soviet Organisation NTS" concluded that it was "the only émigré organisation actively functioning on the territory of the Soviet Union".

At Brooke's trial, it was claimed that the KGB had discovered a list with the names and addresses of 212 people—alleged NTS supporters—which he was to deliver to Konstantinov. Understandably, NTS (writing to its friends from Frankfurt) claimed that these 212 were only the names of prospects selected from directories and newspapers to receive unsolicited propaganda material. Regrettably, the KGB were not likely to swallow this.

A Willing Agent

Why is Gerald Brooke, a sensitive, physically delicate young man, his spirit already broken by the Lubyanka and the Vladimir, his body gravely weakened by a diet which has consisted partly of fish-heads, slaving miserably amongst his fellow-convicts at a camp 200 miles north-east of Moscow?

Western commentators have suggested that he is being held to ransom by the Russians; that the price is the Krogers, Peter and Helen, top Soviet agents held in Britain; and that he is being callously maltreated so that the British Press will force the Government's hand in this.

There is now no doubt that Brooke went to Moscow last year as a willing agent of the NTS. He is intelligent, politically perhaps rather simple, and certainly an idealist; he was certainly untrained for such a dangerous job. But,

Continued